

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

HOUSE

23 June 1954

NEED FOR PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON UNITED STATES FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES

(Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN. Mr. Speaker, I have introduced today a bill, H. R. 9690, to create a Commission on United States Foreign Intelligence Activities. This will be a 9-man Presidential commission, 5 members of which shall be appointed by the President, who shall also designate the chairman. Four members are to be appointed from the Congress, 2 from the Senate and 2 from the House.

This commission will have two major responsibilities: First, to make a full and complete investigation of this country's foreign intelligence activities; and, second, to examine the security of these intelligence agencies from penetration by subversive elements. The findings and recommendations of the commission are to be submitted both to the Congress and the President on or before March 1, 1955.

I should like to make a few brief comments to explain why I am proposing this Commission on United States Foreign Intelligence Activities. In the first place, I think all of us here in Congress recognize that the adequacy, timeliness and overall effectiveness of our national intelligence effort is of vital importance to our national security. The effect of our tremendous military expenditures could be greatly lessened, or even nullified, if our intelligence system is ineffective or faulty. The very safety of our Nation would be jeopardized if we were not forewarned of a sneak attack. It is essential for us to have sound estimates on the intentions and capabilities of our potential enemies. We cannot afford another Pearl Harbor.

A commission such as I am proposing would make a thorough, intensive, and impartial survey of our foreign intelligence activities. No such inquiry has been made since shortly after the passage of the National Security Act of 1947. For that reason it is timely and appropriate to take this step now.

As we all know, the Congress has voted considerable sums for these intelligence agencies, and yet we know virtually nothing as to the scope and success of their operations. Members of the Appropriations Committee and the Armed Services Committee, it is true, have some knowledge of their expenditures and the types of activities involved, but no comprehensive study has been made. For that reason also it seems the part of wisdom for the Congress to authorize this investigation.

I realize that President Eisenhower, if he sees fit, could establish such a Commission without any legislative assistance. On the other hand this is a field where the Congress might logically take the initiative. By expressing congressional interest, we can authorize a discreet but thorough investigation, supervised by a responsible and impartial Commission.

Others have suggested that a joint committee on the Central Intelligence Agency be established to provide a continuous, and presumably discreet, check on that agency. I do not believe such an over-the-shoulder, watchdog committee is necessary. Furthermore, I think that it is preferable for a presidential Commission to be established, with a majority of its members appointed by the President. These intelligence agencies are responsible to the executive branch, and they should be made primarily accountable to the President.

If we agree that a study of some kind is advisable, some of us may feel that an investigation by a congressional committee would be sufficient and appropriate. I definitely do not agree with such a view. The confidential and infinitely varied nature of our intelligence effort, it seems to me, precludes a public airing such as a congressional investigation would entail. It was realized in 1947 that publicity would perhaps defeat the purposes for which the Central Intelligence Agency was formed. For that reason the Congress exempted the CIA from the usual surveillance required of other

governmental activities. A free-wheeling congressional investigation—especially if it were conducted in an irresponsible way, with an eye on publicity rather than the facts—might have disastrous consequences on a delicate and essential instrument of national policy.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, I believe that some form of review of our intelligence activities would be beneficial and proper. At the same time we must make certain that the type of investigation which is undertaken is constructive and not destructive. A presidential Commission such as I am proposing would provide a healthy check and review of these activities without jeopardizing the effectiveness of certain vital governmental agencies. I hope that the Congress will give this proposal its prompt and serious consideration.